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Emperor Charles V Captures Tunis: a Unique Set of Tapestry Cartoons

Katja SCHMITZ-VON LEDEBUR

Emperor Charles V (1500–1558) (fig. 1), for whom the so-called *Tunis Cartoons* were designed, was ruler of the Spanish Empire as well as the Roman Empire since 1519 and it was said that in his realm the sun would never set.



fig. 1. *Conquest of Tunis: The Army Leaves Tunis. Imperial Troops Entering the Camp at Rada* (detail from the 9th cartoon: *Emperor Charles V*), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2046. © KHM-Museumsverband

Francis I (1494–1547), King of France and a potent adversary to Charles, vied with him for domination of Europe. With Sultan Suleiman I (†1566) at its helm since 1520, the Ottoman Empire represented a new world power and a similar threat to Charles V. Referred to as “the magnificent”, Suleiman was indeed an imposing figure, whose character was marked by a great desire for conquest. In 1535, the Emperor Charles V had to use great force for the first time in Tunis to combat

continual attempts by the Ottomans to expand their territory. In August 1534 Kair-ed Din Barbarossa, a Berber prince recently promoted to admiral in the Ottoman navy, captured the strategically important port city of Tunis and deposed Mulay Hassan, a vassal of Charles V. In June 1535 the Emperor set sail for Africa at the head of a fleet comprising 400 ships and over 30.000 soldiers to reconquer Tunis, prevent a further expansion of the Ottoman Empire and keep the Sultan's navy out of the western Mediterranean¹. Charles V likened his campaign to a crusade, hoping to liberate 20.000 (?) Christian slaves. After a three-week siege the imperial troops captured La Goletta, a fort guarding the approach to the capital. The decisive battle in which the Emperor routed the enemy took place in the environs of Tunis.

Along with the combined armadas of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Maltese war ships, Charles ordered the architect and master fortress builder Benedetto da Ravenna (†1556), the Spanish historian and cosmographer Alonso de Santa Cruz (1505–1567), and the painter Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (1500–1559) to take part in his expedition (fig. 2)². If de Santa Cruz functioned as historian, then Vermeyen as correspondent was tasked with documentation of the Emperor's hoped for victory through its depiction in images. Although it is likely that artists had accompanied war campaigns as eyewitnesses since antiquity as well as in the 15th and 16th centuries, Vermeyen would be the first to capture such events in drawings at the behest of a sovereign.



fig. 2. *Conquest of Tunis: The Army Leaves Tunis. Imperial Troops Entering the Camp at Rada* (detail from the 9th cartoon: Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2046. © KHM-Museumsverband

¹ KUGLER G. J., *Der Kriegezug gegen Tunis im Jahre 1535*, in HAAG S. and SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K. (ed.), *Kaiser Karls V. erobert Tunis. Dokumentation eines Kriegezuges in Kartons und Tapisserien*, exh. cat., Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum), 2013, p. 23.

² *Ibidem*, p. 20.

It was not until 1546, 11 years after the victory at Tunis, that Vermeyen received the commission to prepare cartoons for a total of 12 tapestries. The programme for the depiction of war was probably devised by de Santa Cruz. It pays homage to the Emperor's authority, his bravery and strategic abilities as a general, and celebrates him as the protector of the Christian world³.

Drawings and sketches that Vermeyen completed on site, probably in great number, served as his starting materials. The topographical exactness and detail-rich portrayal found in the preserved cartoons would otherwise be quite difficult to explain⁴. This means that not only did Vermeyen produce portraits of the main personages and documentation of the battles, but also sketched the landscape on location, the Arabic buildings, Roman ruins, and local population. Each cartoon depicts one or more phases of the campaign. The foregrounds features large and lively battle scenes in which imperial soldiers are pitted against their Ottoman adversaries, or genre scenes full of interesting details illustrating, for example, camp life or sailors on board of their ships. All cartoons glorify the strategic qualities of the emperor, his courage and fortitude, and celebrate him as the defender of Christendom against the Turks.

The fortunate circumstance that we have knowledge of the contract with the artist as well as the workshop of manufacture, and that assorted correspondence has been preserved, makes possible a relatively precise reconstruction of the production of the cartoons and tapestries⁵.

In 1546 Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen signed a contract with Mary of Hungary (1505–1558), who acted as agent for her imperial brother Charles V. Vermeyen committed himself to complete within 18 months the original, large cartoons required for production of the wall hangings⁶. Each cartoon was to be seven and a half ells high; a border of half an ell was included therein. The small-format drafts of the series that laid the groundwork for the cartoons had already been examined and modified by Mary of Hungary at this time. According to the preserved contract, we also know that Vermeyen had to execute the cartoons “on good paper and in the size of the tapestries to be woven with the best and finest vibrant colors”⁷. Moreover, he had to work with great care and did not take on any other assignments until the cartoons were completed. Vermeyen, who had no experience with the production of tapestry cartoons, was explicitly given permission in the contract to involve helping hands in the project at his own cost. Material from the archive suggests that it is probable that from April 1548 Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502–1550) collaborated on the cartoons. The argument that Coecke himself held the office of court painter and could not have acted as Vermeyen's assistant is easily dismissed as

³ SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Tapisseries mit Darstellungen des Kriegszuges Kaiser Karls V. gegen Tunis*, in ADRIANI G. (ed.), *Die Künstler der Kaiser. Von Dürer bis Tizian, von Rubens bis Velázquez*, exh. cat., Baden Baden (Museum Frieder Burda), 2009, p. 302.

⁴ HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, Painter of Charles V and his Conquest of Tunis: Paintings, Etchings, Drawings, Cartoons & Tapestries*, I, Doornspijk, 1989, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 115–116, 118–125.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 344–345, document 1: *Contract between Mary of Hungary and Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen for the making of the cartoon for the Conquest of Tunis series*, Brussels, June 1546.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 344.

the creation of the cartoons was a prestigious project not commissioned by just anyone but rather the emperor himself⁸.

When Coecke died in 1550 the work on the cartoons was not yet finished. Only on October 22, 1550—four years after the commissioning—could Mary let her brother know that all 12 cartoons had been completed⁹. The cartoons were without framing borders and, as agreed upon in the contract, executed in charcoal pencil and colored with watercolor and gouache paint¹⁰. In most parts the cartoons are very rich in detail (fig. 3) and the monumental depictions combine perfectly the familiar genre of the battle painting with the glorification of the emperor and his army as protectors of the Christian West against the Ottomans.



fig. 3. *Conquest of Tunis: The Capture and Pillage of Tunis* (detail from the eighth cartoon), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2045. © KHM-Museumsverband

The compositions' pronounced perspective view from below allows enough space to depict the most important events of the campaign against a topographically accurate background.

The Tunis tapestries caused quite a furor in the 16th century. It is without a doubt that Emperor Charles V had them made to benefit the self-image of the Habsburgs and serve as propaganda. The tapestries are among the most important artworks commissioned by the Emperor.

The twelve tapestries that were part of the *editio princeps* (ten of them survived and belong to the Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid) were woven in Brussels by the

⁸ SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Kaiser Karl V. und das Medium der Tapisserie*, in HAAG S. and SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K. (ed.), *Kaiser Karls V.... op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁹ HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen... op. cit.*, p. 376, document 28: *Excerpt from a letter from Mary of Hungary to Charles V in Augsburg indicating that work on all twelve tapestries of the Conquest of Tunis is under way*, Brussels, 22 October 1550.

¹⁰ Even if the cartoons don't have framing borders we know from the archival records that Vermeyen agreed to design borders as well as captions. See HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen... op. cit.*, p. 124.

successful manufactory of Willem de Pannemaker between 1548–1554. To this end the manufacturer signed a contract with Mary of Hungary in February 1548¹¹. In this, he undertakes to use only the best wool from Lyon and the finest silk from Granada as well as metal threads (gold and silver) in a specific quantity per tapestry¹². In 1554 all twelve tapestries were finished with a height of approximately 525 cm and between 710 and 980 cm width¹³. Pannemaker himself brought them to England where they were presented for the first time on the occasion of the second wedding of Philipp II of Spain, son of Charles, with Mary Tudor in Winchester Cathedral on 25 July¹⁴.

Subsequent additional Tunis tapestries were made in Brussels, but it is quite plausible that distinct cartoons were completed for them. For example the hangings produced for Mary of Hungary between 1555 and 1558, lost to us today, were smaller in format and the tapestry in the former possession of Cardinal Perenot de Granvelle (1517–1586), today found in Mechelen (ca. 1565–1566, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen) (fig. 4), combines together scenes from different Tunis tapestries¹⁵.



fig. 4. *Conquest of Tunis*, tapestry woven under the direction of Willem de Pannemaker, Brussels, ca. 1565–1566, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen.

¹¹ KUGLER G. and BAUER R., *Die edition princeps für Kaiser Karl V., Brüssel 1548–1554, und weitere Tapisserien Willem de Pannemakers*, in HAAG S. and SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K. (ed.), *Kaiser Karls V.... op. cit.*, p. 60. See also HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen... op. cit.*, pp. 348–351, document 4: *Agreement between Mary of Hungary and Willem de Pannemaker*, Brussels, 20 February 1548.

¹² KUGLER G. and BAUER R., *Die edition princeps... op. cit.*, p. 60 and HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen... op. cit.*, p. 351.

¹³ KUGLER G. and BAUER R., *Die edition princeps... op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁴ SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Kaiser Karl V.... op. cit.*, p. 41; SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Fäden der Macht. Tapisserien des 16. Jahrhunderts aus dem Kunsthistorischen Museum*, exh. cat., Vienna, (Kunsthistorisches Museum), 2015, p. 200.

¹⁵ HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen... op. cit.*, p. 131.

The exceptionally artistic nature of the primary Tunis cartoons paired with the historical significance of the depicted war campaign may well have been pivotal reasons for their being held in high regard, which lasted for centuries.

After their creation, the original cartoons appear on the scene again at the end of the 16th century in the estate inventory of Archduke Ernest of Austria (1553–1595), son of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, and general governor of the Spanish Low Countries, who in turn possessed a large art collection. In the inventory of 1595 there is an entry concerning “10 old, large patterns for a series of tapestries of Charles V.” A note further explains: “these patterns belong to the old Count of Mansfeld who wants them back”¹⁶. This Mansfeld served Charles V and Philip II and was himself in attendance during the Tunis expedition. His interest in the cartoons is therefore understandable. When and in what form the cartoons came into his possession and in turn were handed over to Ernest of Austria is unknown. It can at least be assumed that the 10 cartoons – two were apparently already missing – were inherited by Ernest's brother, the Emperor Rudolph II (1552–1612).

It will take several decades before we hear again of the fate of the cartoons. In the year 1675 they are identified in Joachim von Sandrarts popular “Teutsche Academie” as works by Vermeyen as well as patterns for the production of tapestries. Where they were stored or in whose ownership they were found goes unmentioned. In 1680 the “histoire de Charles V. de la prise de Tunis et Golette” is mentioned in a correspondence between Anton Le Roy de St. Lambert and Count Ferdinand Bonaventura Harrach. It is noted that Harrach “a trouvé le patron” and that he was thinking about the production of a new set of tapestries as Le Roy already started to look for an appropriate manufactory¹⁷. The design of the patron is surprisingly attributed to the “fameux Titian”¹⁸.

Only a short time later, at the beginning of the 18th century, the cartoons were linked to the Italian painter Titian (†1576) again. At that time Charles VI (1685–1740) (fig. 5) came to the decision to allow another and final tapestry series based on them to be made for reasons of imperial propaganda¹⁹. Some sources indicate that Charles VI bought the cartoons²⁰ or at least released the cartoons from unworthy hiddenness, let them be mended and send them to Brussels for the production of the tapestries²¹. On March 10th, 1712, a contract to this end was finalized between

¹⁶ Nachlassinventar Erzherzog Ernst 1595, published in: HAUPT H. and WIED A. (ed.), *Erzherzog Ernst von Österreich (1553 – 1595) Statthalter der Spanischen Niederlande. Das Kassabuch der Jahre 1589 bis 1595*, in *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien*, vol. 12, 2010, p. 275.

¹⁷ MANCIK F., *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Kaiserlichen Tapezereisammlung: aus dem Gräfl. Harrachschen Archive*, in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, vol. 30, Vienna, Leipzig 1911, 1912, XXXIV–XLVI, XLII, no 20291.

¹⁸ MANCIK F., *Dokumente...* *op. cit.*, XLII, no 20292.

¹⁹ HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen...* *op. cit.*, p. 134.

²⁰ „Die zehn erhaltenen Kartons von Kaiser Karl VI. Anfang des XVIII. Jahrhunderts in Brüssel erworben [...]“. *Katalog der Gemäldegalerie*, second edition, Vienna, 1938, p. 187.

²¹ “Diese zehn Cartons wurden nach mehr als 150 Jahren von K. Carl VI. aus unwürdiger Verborgenheit hervorgehoben, auf dessen Befehl ausgebessert, und sofort nach Brüssel an den kunstreichen Jodocus de Vos zur Verfertigung von Tapeten gesendet [...]“. Remark from Carl Gustav Heraeus, quoted in: Joseph Bergmann, *Über K Carl's VI. Rath und Hof-Antiquarius Carl Gustav Heraeus, dessen Stammbuch und Correspondenz. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des K. K. Münz- und Antiken-Cabinetes*, Vienna 1854, p. 67.

the imperial court chamber in Vienna and the Brussels-based merchant and tapestry maker Jodocus de Vos for the production of 10 tapestries to be delivered within three years²². We must remember, that 2 cartoons had already gone missing. Ultimately, it would take 9 years to complete all of the wall hangings. The motivation behind the commissioning of a new edition of the series is likely to have been political, as Charles VI had staked a claim to the Spanish crown in addition to that as Holy Roman Emperor, the first time these titles would have been united in one person since Charles V. He was also fond of comparing himself with Charles V and endeavored to continue the latter's legacy in many respects²³.

The contract with de Vos reveals detailed information about the commission. At the beginning of the contract, it was established that de Vos would complete the tapestries after the 10 “drafts by the world famous painter Titian created with watercolors on paper”²⁴. The designs were “in good trust and faith handed over into trustworthy hands,” those of the weaver, and he was forbidden “[sic] weder in copia, vill weniger in originali zu ändern als widerumb zu allerhöchstgedacht seiner kais.maj. handen oder in dero cammer khomben solten”²⁵. That means De Vos obligated himself not only to hand the cartoons over to the emperor and no one else, but also to not create any copies.



fig. 5. *Emperor Charles VI*, Johann Gottfried Auerbach, Austria, 1st half of the 18th century, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv-no GG 1810. © KHM-Museumsverband

²² *Contract between the office of the imperial court and the tapestry maker Jodocus de Vos, March 10th 1712*, Vienna, Austrian State Archives, inv. no. AT-OeStA/FHKA SUS KuR C-15.

²³ „Kaiser Karl VI. zog im Jahr 1712 diese Cartons wieder aus der Vergessenheit hervor und ließ nach denselben Tapeten wirken.“ *Oesterreichische Kaiserliche Wiener Zeitung*, no 280, 23 November 1854, 3219.

²⁴ Transliteration of the contract in: HAAG S. and SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K. (ed.), *Kaiser Karls V.... op. cit.*, p. 132.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

Furthermore de Vos was assured that his costs for painters would be compensated, who were required for completing additions to the cartoons, “welche er [de Vo] von dise zechen stuckh spällier an den luft und vorgrund dessen mahlern bezahlen wirdt”²⁶. When comparing the cartoons with Charles VI's tapestries preserved in Vienna, one easily recognizes what is meant in this case by “additions”. The foregrounds of the compositions were expanded (fig. 6). The resulting new dimensions of the individual pieces were explicitly stated in the contract. Furthermore a large figure with a dog has been added to the design. The eighth tapestry (*The Capture and Pillage of Tunis*) shows this figure on the right-hand side wearing a *banyan* and home slippers. It could be de Vos himself or the painter who reworked the cartoons or rather made new cartoons after the original ones for the weaving process.²⁷ Probably this specific garment has been chosen to make clear that this person in contrast to the other depicted figures didn't participated in the conquest in person.²⁸

Moreover, the materials to be used for the 18th century tapestries were also specified in the contract. No gold or silver thread was to be used – perhaps for financial reasons; only wool and silk “of the most beautiful crimson and of permanent hue” everything “of the best quality and high-grade without the slightest defect”²⁹.



fig. 6. *Conquest of Tunis: Landing off the Cape of Carthage*, tapestry woven under the direction of Jodocus de Vos, Brussels, 1712–1721, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstkammer, inv-no T X/2.
© KHM-Museumsverband

The final invoice of 1721, however, demonstrates that despite the contract, metal thread was indeed applied, even if only in the borders, as is documented in the tapestries themselves. De Vos had to provide designs for these borders because they were lacking in the original cartoons. They integrate the double headed eagle at the top and new inscriptions at the lower edge.

²⁶ Transliteration of the contract in *Ibidem*, p. 133.

²⁷ It seems to be plausible that the preserved original cartoons weren't used for the weaving process but that new cartoons were made on the basis of the original ones.

²⁸ Portraits of Charles V, Jan Vermeyen and others can be found several times in the cartoons.

²⁹ Transliteration of the contract in *Ibidem*, p. 132.

The imperial inspector of medals and antiquities of Emperor Charles VI, Carl Gustav Heraeus (1671–1725), was commissioned with the composition of the Latin text. It is interesting that in archival record from 1721 Heraeus attributes the cartoons to Vermeyen, however the important figures, as he calls them, mistakenly to Titian³⁰.

Heraeus's opinion is justified in that some of the prominent protagonists in the foreground of several cartoons in fact are executed in a distinct style and surely were not drafted by Vermeyen. These figures can without a doubt be attributed to Pieter Coecke van Aelst. Obvious are for example the stylistic parallels (figs. 7a, 7b) between a warrior from the Tunis cartoon *The Quest for Fodder*, holding onto his dying comrade and Joshua in the tapestry *The Crossing of the River Jordan* from the tapestry series with *Scenes from the Book of Joshua* preserved in Vienna (ca. 1536). The series was likely created by Coecke shortly after his return from Constantinople, that is, after 1533³¹.



fig. 7a. *Story of Joshua: The Crossing of the River Jordan*, tapestry designed by Pieter Coecke van Aelst, before 1538 (woven probably before 1544, detail), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstkammer, inv-no T XIX/2.
© KHM-Museumsverband



fig. 7b. *Conquest of Tunis: The Quest for Fodder* (detail from the fifth cartoon), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2042.
© KHM-Museumsverband

Just as apparent are the stylistic parallels between other figures from the Joshua and the Tunis set. A view of the back of a warrior from the Tunis cartoon *The Siege of La Goletta* exhibits direct parallels to the figure of Joshua from the hanging *The Fall of Jericho* (figs. 8a, 8b).

³⁰ In his workbook Heraeus explicitly points to Titian: “Ao. 1712. haben Seine Kaiserl:May: die solange verborgen gelegene Original Riße des Titians zu X. Tapezereyen, vorstellend die Thaten Caroli V. in Africa wieder hervorsuchen, ausbessern, mit Inscriptionen erklären, und, soforth nach Niederlandt zür Wirklichen Verfertigung senden lassen”. From: Carl Gustav Heraeus, *Journal / oder "Hand=Buch, / Wobinnein eylig, und ohne ausführlichen Umständen getragen wird alleß waß / S[ein]e Röm=Kays. und Cath. Mayst. / meiner Verwahrung allergnädigst anvertrauen / oder mir sonst anbefehlen. / Dienend zur Nachricht von dem neu eingerichteten Cimeliarchio Carolino / Biß darüber gebührende genaue Catalogi können / Verfertigt werden.* (Münzkabinett, Numismatisches Archiv), approx. 1712–1722, 7.

³¹ SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Fäden der Macht...* op. cit., pp. 76–85.



fig. 8a. *Story of Joshua: Jebova orders Joshua to cross the Jordan into the promised land*, tapestry designed by Pieter Coecke van Aelst, before 1538 (woven probably before 1544, detail), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv-no T XIX/1.
© KHM-Museumsverband



fig. 8b. *Conquest of Tunis: The Siege of La Goletta* (detail from the fourth cartoon), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2041.
© KHM-Museumsverband

Similarities in many of the details of the Tunis sets and other designs by Coecke are also striking. For example the head covering from a warrior in the fifth Tunis cartoon, *The Quest for Fodder*, that also appears in *The Martyrdom of Saint Paul* (figs. 9a, 9b). This tapestry is part of a set dedicated to the life of Saint Paul, which belongs to Coecke's early works in textile production (ca. 1529–1530)³².



fig. 9a. *Life of Saint Paul: The Martyrdom of Saint Paul*, tapestry designed by Pieter Coecke van Aelst, ca.1529 (woven ca. 1535, detail), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv-no T III/4. © KHM-Museumsverband



fig. 9b. *Conquest of Tunis: The Quest for Fodder* (detail from the fifth cartoon), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2042.
© KHM-Museumsverband

³² For further parallels between Coeckes designs and the Tunis set see SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Kaiser Karl V.... op. cit.*, p. 42.

As one can imagine, the Tunis tapestries exhibit precisely with regard to the costumes and figurative style parallels to Coecke's frieze *Customs and Fashions of the Turks* that comprises a total of ten woodcuts (published after Coeckes death by his widow Mayken Verhulst in 1553) and was probably originally intended to be transposed into a tapestry set³³. Coecke drew his inspiration for this frieze from a journey he undertook to Constantinople in 1533, probably at the request of several Brussels manufactories, in an effort to persuade Sultan Suleiman to purchase tapestries.

An in-depth analysis of the Tunis designs and the archive material indicates that Coecke collaborated on four of the in Vienna preserved cartoons, whereby his hand can be most clearly verified in the large-format figures in the foreground³⁴.

When one now compares the cartoons by Vermeyen and Coecke van Aelst with both series definitely fabricated after them, namely the *editio princeps* stored in Madrid and the series stored in Vienna fabricated for Emperor Charles VI, it quickly becomes clear that they are completely different in character (figs. 10, 11).



fig. 10. *Conquest of Tunis: The Quest for Fodder* (tapestry from the *editio princeps*, woven under the direction of Willem de Pannemaker, Brussel, 1550–1552, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional.

© Patrimonio Nacional

³³ SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Fäden der Macht...* op. cit., pp. 76–85.

³⁴ Concerning the preserved cartoons these are: *The Emperor Mustering his Troops at Barcelona*, *First Skirmishes on the Cape of Carthage*, *The Siege of La Goletta* and *The Quest for Fodder*. Concerning the *Map of the Field of Battle* (cartoon not preserved) see CAMPBELL T. (ed.), *Tapestry in the Renaissance. Art and Magnificence*, exh. cat., New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), 2002, pp. 388–389.



fig. 11. *Conquest of Tunis: The Quest for Fodder*, tapestry woven under the direction of Jodocus de Vos, Brussels, 1712–1721, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv-no T X/9.
© KHM-Museumsverband

The 18th century series orients itself exactly to the cartoons, yet its effect is much more painterly than those of the 16th century³⁵. Very clear is the difference, for example, in the treatment of the sea waves. In the Madrid pieces, they appear rather ornamental and planar in their execution³⁶. In the Vienna tapestries, the surface of the frothy waves are accentuated with pale threads woven into the very fine fabric, conveying a naturalistic and expressive impression. One must of course bear in mind that the two series are separated by about 160 years. The heightened theatricality and drama captured in the Vienna wall hangings is entirely in keeping with the Baroque period.

The colors also differ from the *editio princeps*. De Vos brightened the color palette³⁷, creating tension between the powerfully colorful figures in the foreground and the rather delicate tones of the background.

The many fine details are not insignificant, for which the hands of the weavers working directly on the tapestries are to be thanked, granting each tapestry its own character. The weavers enrich for example costumes, enlivening the sky, vegetation and folds of the robes. Above all, we have the impression that the expressivity of some faces has been intensified, as if the figures in the cartoons, while defined and artistically rendered, fully mature in the tapestries and become more emotionally complex. At times, the interventions are subtle but nevertheless effective, like the dying warrior from the tapestry *The Quest for Fodder*. A deeply felt compassion is

³⁵ SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Tapissereien mit Darstellungen...* op. cit., pp. 300–319; SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K., *Fäden der Macht...* op. cit., pp. 196–207.

³⁶ KUGLER G. J. and BAUER R., *Die Wiederholung der Tunis-Serie für Jaiser Karl VI. durch Jodocus de Vos*, in HAAG S. and SCHMITZ-von LEDEBUR K. (ed.), *Kaiser Karls V....* op. cit., p. 111.

³⁷ HORN H. J., *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen...* op. cit., p. 132.

palpable in the wide open eyes and the fraught, drawn together brows of the dying soldier.

Upon completion of the tapestries for Charles VI, after 9 years instead of the agreed 3, the cartoons were brought back to Vienna probably in pieces of a manageable size. They appear to have remained in good condition and were probably adhered to a canvas shortly after arrival in Vienna. It is possible that the cartoons were stored at the latest from 1781 in the Belvedere palace, formerly the residence of Prince Eugene of Savoy, and new location for the imperial picture gallery under Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790) in an explicitly designated storage space³⁸.

Although kept under lock and key, the cartoons, which today measure between ca. 6.70 and 9 meters wide and 3.50 high, had occasionally to be viewed by experts. In 1818 they were the subject of a newspaper article that compared their content with that of the “Trojan Adventure.” Their extraordinarily beautiful aesthetic impact is emphasized and they are designated a *treasure* due to their accurate rendering of traditional dress, instruments of war, and sea creatures. We can also read that the cartoons were executed on paper, “welches über Leinwand gespannt ist”, and the article closes with the statement “as soon as anything certain about the classification of these cartoons comes to be known, our newspaper will furnish the information”³⁹. At this point in time public interest in the cartoons and their whereabouts already existed.

Just three years later, the cartoons are incorporated into a publication by Alois Primmer (1796–1827), the custodian of the Imperial-Royal Coin and Antiques Cabinet, who saw them some years earlier, probably in 1818. He writes that the “tremendous size of these pictures, which alone would fill the walls of several large halls, their unrolling and permanent display creates obstacles not easy to resolve,” and that “the great value, however, of these estimable works to the historical researcher, as well as artist,” is reason enough to make possible their presentation “at the first opportunity to arise”⁴⁰.

After the English ship captain Sir Henri Thompson failed in his attempt in 1822 to purchase the cartoons for 10.000 pound sterling⁴¹, a succession of recurring references to them are found in Vienna's local press, and to the fact that they cannot be shown due to a lack of space⁴².

³⁸ “Diese Kartons befinden sich im Magazin der Kaiserlichen Gallerie im Belvedere in Wien.” Oesterreichische Kaiserliche Wiener Zeitung, No 310, 29. Dezember 1853, 3134. Emperor Joseph II and his mother Maria Theresia decided in 1776 to transfer the k. k. picture gallery from the so-called Stallburg to the upper Belvedere. Christian von Mechel (1737–1817) has been the scientific supervisor to organize the collection and to open it for the general public.

³⁹ Janus, 31. Oktober 1818, *Über die Kartone des Johann von Vermeyen genannt Hans mit dem langen Bart, den Zug Karls des Fünften nach Tunis darstellend*, p. 47. Continuation of the article in: Janus, 7. November 1818, *Über die Kartone des Johann Cornelius von Vermeyen*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ PRIMISSER A., *Über die zehn von Hans Vermeyen gemahlten Kartone, darstellend: Carls V. Feldzug gegen Tunis*, in VON HORMAYR J., *Archiv für Geographie, Historie, Staats- und Kriegskunst*, 12. Jahrgang, Wien, 10 and 12 January 1821, p. 34.

⁴¹ Notification by the curator Ross to the Oberstkämmereramt, 1822.

⁴² For example in Die Presse, No 51, 13. Jahrgang, 20. Februar 1860: „Die Kaiserliche Galerie im Belvedere besitzt außer den bekannten Werke, welche in den Sälen desselben ausgestellt sind, noch eine nicht geringe Anzahl von Kunstschatzen, die entweder wegen Mangel an Raum bisher nicht ausgestellt werden konnten, wie die Cartons von Vermeyen aus der Zeit Kaiser Karls V. [...]“

In April 1867 a loud uproar circulated in the press because it was suspected that the cartoons were to be sent to Paris for decoration of the Austrian art pavillion on the occasion of the World Exhibition⁴³. It could be quickly reported, however, that this was only a misunderstanding because under no circumstances were the priceless cartoons to travel but rather, the Tunis tapestries would be sent to the French metropolis. Vermeyen's cartoons were to remain to the contrary in storage in the Belvedere palace⁴⁴.

Planning for presentation of the cartoons in the 1860s finally took on a concrete form when the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830–1916) commissioned a new building, a museum for his art collections in the proximity of the Hofburg Palace in Vienna. The responsible architects were Gottfried Semper and Karl Hasenauer. At the onset of planning, suitable exhibition spaces for the large-format works by Vermeyen were taken into account along with the question of their optimal lighting.⁴⁵ The transfer of the art treasures to the new building started in the 1880s. At that time, around 1889, the sole photographs of the Tunis cartoons - black and-white - in their entirety were probably taken by the court photographer Josef Löwy (1834–1902), of which today only 4 examples remain (fig. 12).

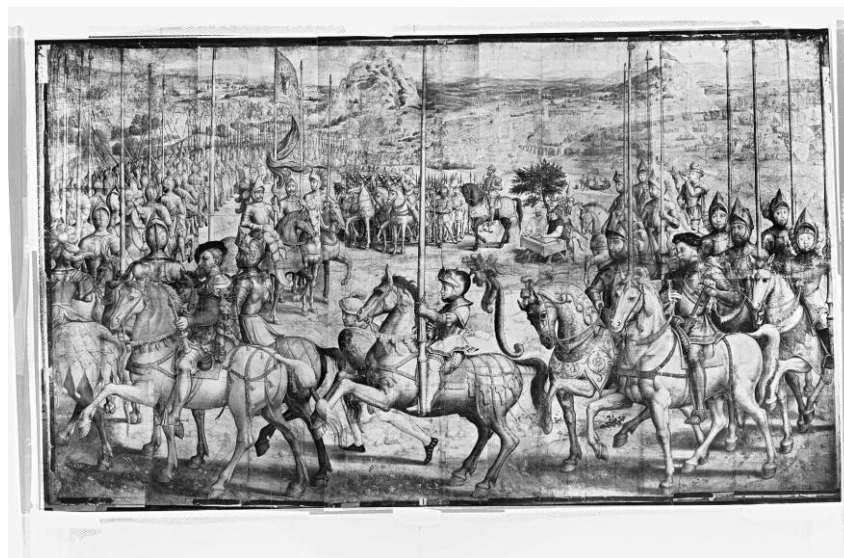


fig. 12. *Conquest of Tunis: The Emperor mustering his Troops at Barcelona* (1st cartoon), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 2038. © KHM-Museumsverband

⁴³ Neues Fremden-Blatt, No 95, 3. Jahrgang, 7. April 1867: „Nun ist das Sonderbare geschehen, daß uns die Zeitungen vor Kurzem einen kleinen Bericht über die Ausschmückung der österreichischen Abtheilung im Pariser Industriepalaste gaben und bei dieser Gelegenheit erwähnten, die Vermeyen'schen Tapeten seien zur theilweisen dekorativen Ausschmückung der Ausstellungsräume verwendet worden! Wir können es nicht glauben und erwarten täglich ein Dementi in dieser Sache von berufener Seite.“

⁴⁴ Neue Freie Presse, Morgenblatt, No 936, 9. April 1867 and Wiener Zeitung, No 84, 9. April 1867, 87: „Die kaiserliche Galerie im Belvedere besitzt bekanntlich zehn Cartons – nicht Tapeten nach Cartons – von Vermeyen (Hanns v. d. Mayen), den Feldzug Kaiser Karl's V. nach Tunis darstellend. Diese Cartons haben das Belvedere nicht verlassen.“

⁴⁵ The necessary space for the cartoons was calculated by a commission. See Wiener Zeitung, No 190, 10. August 1867, 440. The civil servants of the gallery preferred side lighting, the artists on the contrary skylight. See LHOTSKY A., *Die Baugeschichte der Museen und der Neuen Burg*, Vienna, 1941, p. 51.

The opening of the museum, known to us today as the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, took place on October 17, 1891 in the presence of the Emperor (fig. 13). During his 2 ½ hour tour he lingered for some time in the Picture Gallery on the first floor, where he viewed the paintings by Rubens and van Dyck. “He was particularly interested in [...] the depictions of war by Snyders and by VERMEYEN”⁴⁶.



fig. 13. Opening of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in the presence of Emperor Franz Joseph I on 17.10.1891, Robert Raschka, 1891, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv-no GG 5990.

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The Tunis cartoons hung at this time in two rooms of the Picture Gallery on the first floor with light from above⁴⁷. In the course of a rehanging and new presentation of the paintings collection in 1908, the space-consuming cartoons were transferred to the second floor of the museum to free up space on the first floor. At first in the so-called Risalit gallery and one adjacent gallery. Just a few years later they had to give way again, and were installed in the passageway of the second floor of the Kunsthistorisches Museum (fig. 14). The art historian Gustav Glück, who

⁴⁶ Neue Freie Presse, 18 Oktober 1891.

⁴⁷ LHOTSKY A., *Festschrift des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien, 1891-1941: Die Geschichte der Sammlungen*, vol. 2, II, pp. 640–641.

was head of the picture gallery from 1911 to 1931, commented the transfer of the cartoons as follows „die Secundärgalerie, die trotz ihrer sehr gedrängten Aufstellung sich für kunsthistorische Studien als außerordentlich nützlich erweist, [konnte] dadurch nicht unwesentlich entlastet werden, dass der größte Teil der Wandteppichkartone von Jan Vermeyen in den Vorräumen des II. Stocks aufgestellt wurde. Die Umstellung machte zwar wegen des großen Formates und der Verglasung dieser kunstgeschichtlich interessanten Stücke viel Mühe und auch Kosten; es wurde aber dadurch auch erreicht, daß die bisher nackten Räume sich durch den Schmuck der Kartone sowie einiger Depotbilder viel günstiger präsentieren, zumal da sie als Zugang zu der Münzen- und Medaillensammlung vom Publikum benützt werden“⁴⁸.

To this day the cartoons are found in this unfortunate location. For one thing, this is a narrow corridor that in actuality does not represent an exhibition space. As a result, there is no place from which it is possible to view the cartoons from an appropriate distance. Moreover, the lighting is extremely difficult to place and the adjacent windows are reflected in the glazing on the cartoons.

A project to study the condition of the cartoons in detail, to restore them, to deepen the scientific research and to bring them back again to the attention of the general public has already been engaged.⁴⁹



fig. 14. Kunsthistorisches Museum, *Conquest of Tunis* cartoons exhibited on the second floor, 2017.
© KHM-Museumsverband

⁴⁸ *Annual report of the Kunsthistorisches Museum 1929*, Kunsthistorisches Museum AR I/126, fol. 56–57. We can find the cartoons already on the second floor of the museum in 1928 in the floor plan of the overview guide.

⁴⁹ In 2013 an exhibition about the cartoons has taken place and in 2015 they were involved in the tapestry exhibition “Threads of Power” (both exhibitions have been curated by the author of this essay). Furthermore, a section of the museum's website is dedicated to the cartoons.

Short description of the ten Tunis cartoons:

1. The Emperor Mustering his Troops at Barcelona

The first surviving cartoon by Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen depicts Emperor Charles V before the onset of hostilities. Although placed in the background of the composition, Charles V is depicted on his charger mustering his troops in the centre of the first cartoon. He is accompanied by a detachment of Life Guards and mounted heralds. The two men seated at a table beneath a capital tree are keeping the army lists. The rider on the grey in the foreground on the right is probably the third duke of Alba, Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, one of the Emperor's most trusted military advisors. He is followed by another prominent Spanish general, Luis Hurtado de Mendoza, the second Marchese of Mondéjar.

2. Landing off the Cape of Carthage

The flagship of Admiral Andrea Doria dominates the foreground of the second cartoon. Accompanied by a woman, he is seated on the quarterdeck, while the boatswain at the prow is blowing his whistle, giving the order to lower the lateen sail. Further to the left German Lansquenets and members of the baggage train, among them female camp followers, monks and the commissary are being ferried to the shore where the Emperor is already awaiting them.

3. First Skirmishes on the Cape of Carthage

The imperial troops first attacked La Goletta, the fort defended by Kair-ed Din Barbarossa's soldiers; it is depicted in the background of the third cartoon in Vienna. In the middle ground Spanish troops under the command of the Marchese del Vasto are engaging Turkish soldiers. In the foreground on the left German Lansquenets, sent by the Emperor to relieve the Spaniards, are attacking the enemy with Harquebuses.

4. The Siege of La Goletta

Barbarossa had taken up position at La Goletta with around 5000 Ottoman and Moorish soldiers. Although outnumbered, the 14 imperial troops were able to capture the fort on July 14 after laying siege to it for three weeks. This important phase of the campaign is depicted in several cartoons. The fourth cartoon in Vienna features the siege of La Goletta. The eight galleys attacking it from the sea are shown in the foreground; in the middle ground one can see the Emperor, supported by the artillery, at the head of his infantry tightening the ring around the fort.

5. The Quest for Fodder

Here Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen has moved the spectator's viewpoint to the Cape of Carthage looking east. In the background one can see the lake of Tunis and the fort La Goletta. Returning from an expedition to collect horse fodder in a forest behind the ruins of an aqueduct, the Marchese d'Alarcon and his men have come under attack from mounted enemy soldiers. But the imperial cavalry and infantry are rushing to their aid. Emperor Charles V himself is depicted on his charger to the left of his mounted lancers. The foreground of the composition is dominated by Ottomans on horseback bravely riding into battle.

6. The Capture of La Goletta

After a tower on the Cape of Carthage held by a small group of Spaniards was attacked by a superior force the Emperor decided to storm La Goletta on July 14. This final and successful onslaught, depicted on the sixth cartoon, featured a concerted attack by sea and land forces. One can see the imperial ships and galleys bombarding the fort. The Emperor and Mulay Hassan are watching the unfolding battle from one of the ships.

7. The Pitched Battle on the Road to Tunis

Pursuing Barbarossa's fleeing troops, the imperial army braved the scorching summer heat and marched on towards Tunis led by Mulay Hassan, who was familiar with both the local terrain and the location of wells. A well about three kilometres from Tunis was the site of the decisive battle, which began when Barbarossa attacked the imperial army. Taking charge personally, the Emperor cleverly deployed his troops and routed the enemy. Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen carefully depicts the only pitched battle of the entire campaign: the imperial army on the right is advancing towards Barbarossa's troops arranged opposite it and in a half-circle under the crescent standard.

8. The Capture and Pillage of Tunis

Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen paid particular attention to topographic accuracy in his renderings of the battle sites. The easily identifiable view of mediaeval Tunis dominates the background of the eighth cartoon in Vienna. Following the unopposed capture of the city, it was pillaged. The possessions of its inhabitants were confiscated and many of them sold into slavery.

By including himself in this cartoon as a "war correspondent", Vermeyen emphasizes his dedication to verisimilitude. He depicts himself standing on a small hill clutching his sketchbook.

9. The Army Leaves Tunis. Imperial Troops Entering the Camp at Rada

After eight days in Tunis, the Emperor gave the order to return to Rada. He is shown in the centre of the middle ground astride his charger, a few Moors falling to their knees before him to beg for mercy. The Emperor, the *miles christianus*, is accompanied by a detachment of cavalry bearing a standard depicting the Crucified Christ. The whole retreat is arranged like a triumphal march. The baggage train includes the booty.

10. The Departure from Goletta

The final cartoon completes the series; it depicts life in the camp and work on the fortifications of La Goletta.

Our gaze takes in the fort and the imperial fleet anchored off the Cape of Carthage, where the first ships are already setting sail.

In the foreground one can see various preparations for the army's imminent departure: burying the dead in the trenches; collecting canons and cannonballs and loading them onto the ships. In the centre of the composition Emperor Charles V is negotiating a new treaty with his vassal Mulay Hassan. Sitting in a trench, Vermeyen spends his time producing some more sketches.